

OFFICIAL STATEMENT OF THE EUROPE-CUBA NGO NETWORK REGARDING THE DEATH OF ORLANDO ZAPATA TAMAYO

Yesterday, on February 23, Cuban political prisoner Orlando Zapata Tamayo died, aged 42, after more than 80 days of hunger strike. Elizardo Sánchez, leader of Cuban Human Rights and National Reconciliation Commission, commented: „*His death is an example of totalitarian arrogance of power, which does not care about human consequences of its deeds*”.

The reaction of Pavla Holcová, leader of the Cuban program in Czech NGO People in Need was following: *“The fact that political adversaries in Cuba are dying in the prisons is alarming.”*

Zapata Tamayo, as a member of oppositional movement, had been arrested several times. The first imprisonment took place in 2002, the reason being his participation on a hunger strike expressing solidarity with political prisoners. The official accusation was „public disorder“, the sentence was four months. Only a few days after his release, not having committed any crime, he was imprisoned again during the Black spring in 2003 and sentenced to three years of confinement. Subsequently his penalty was prolonged twice, total length of 36 years behind the bars. In the same year, Amnesty International declared him a prisoner of conscience.

At the beginning of December 2009, Zapata initiated a hunger strike in one of the Cuban worst prisons, Kilo 8 in Camagüey, protesting against inhuman living conditions of the prisoners. For 18 days Zapata Tamayo was denied access to drinking water by the director of the prison, consequently suffering from kidney failure. In mid January 2010 he was hospitalized in a critical state. However, he was placed in a room with intense air conditioning, which lead to pneumonia. Last week Zapata Tamayo was transferred to a hospital in Havana, where he died lacking appropriate care.

Europe – Cuba NGO Network calls on the Cuban government to assume responsibility for the case and to apply measures preventing recurrence of similar cases in the future. Europe – Cuba NGO Network calls for the release of all prisoners of conscience, particularly those in critical health conditions - Ariel Sigler Amaya and Normando Hernández González.

Signed by:

Asociacion Cuba en Transicion, Spain

Asociacion de Ibero-americanos por la Libertad, Spain

Asociatia Pro Democratia, Romania

Cuba Futuro, Netherlands

Christian Solidarity Worldwide, UK

Eastern European Studies Center, Lithuania

Freedom and Democracy Foundation, Poland

Freedom House Europe, Hungary

Fundacion Hispano Cubana, Spain

International Society for Human Rights, Germany

Lech Walesa Institute, Poland

People in Peril Association, Slovakia

People in Need, Czech Republic

Unitas Foundation, Estonia

